

# The Icelandic Canadian

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# *The Front Cover Verse*

ÞÓ ÞÚ LANGFÖRULL LEGÐIR

eftir Stephan G. Stephansson

★

Þó þú lang-förull legðir  
sérhvert land undir fót,  
bera hugur og hjarta  
samt þíns heima-lands mót,  
frændka eldfjalls og íshafs!  
sifji árfoss og hvers!  
dóttir langholts og lyngmós!  
sonur land-vers og skers!

Yfir heim eða himin  
hvort sem hugar þín önd,  
skreyta fossar og fjalls-hlíð  
öll þín framtíðar lönd!  
Fjarst í eilífðar útsæ  
vakir eylandan þín:  
nóttlaus vor-aldar veröld  
þar sem víðsýnið skín.

Það er óska-land íslenzkt,  
sem að yfir þú býr —  
aðeins blómgróin björgin,  
sérhver bald-jökull hlýr,  
frændka eldfjalla og íshafs!  
sifji árfoss og hvers!  
dóttir langholts og lyngmós!  
sonur landvers og skers!

THOUGH YOU TRAVEL AFAR

Stephan G. Stephansson

Translated by Paul Bjarnason

To the uttermost outlands  
Of the earth you may roam,  
In the mind every moment  
Are the mem'ries of home,  
Friend of glacier and glenside,  
Kin of geyser and mount,  
Niece of long-ness and ling-heath,  
Son of land-ice and fount.

O'er the world and the welkin  
Though you wander in thought,  
With their high-falls and hillsides  
All your hope-lands are wrought.  
In life's everness-ocean  
Your dear Isle-land abides,  
where the sun knows no setting  
On the shimmering tides.

It's your ever-dear Iceland  
In the image you love,  
With each fellside enflowered  
And no frost cups above,  
Friend of glacier and glenside,  
Kin of geyser and mount,  
Niece of long-ness and ling-heath,  
Son of land-ice and fount.

—1955

## **EDITORIAL**

One of the main objectives of THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN is to help to keep alive the Icelandic spirit and culture on the North American continent as a part of the ethnic blend of Canadian and American cultures. The desirability of the attainment of this goal is well illustrated by three articles in this issue and the FRONT COVER POEM.

In the article OUR ICELANDIC HERITAGE the Rev. S. T. Guttormsson enumerates and illustrates certain qualities which, while by no means a monopoly of our race, are the woof and the warp of the Icelandic spirit. They sustained the nation throughout centuries of adversity, and enabled it to survive in a hostile environment.

No more appropriate corollary could have accompanied the Rev. Guttormsson's article than Lena Thorleifsson's A PIONEER. The qualities of the Icelandic spirit exhibited by this immigrant woman are the foundation upon which the greatness of a nation is built.

The article A PILGRIMAGE TO NORSELAND by Dr. R. Beck is permeated by that love of the land and the people which has roots deep in its stirring history, whose strength and faith have builded a thriving present upon the ruins of a capricious past, and whose sure and steady gaze envisions the golden dawn of the future looming bright upon the horizon:

"Love thou thy land, with love far-brought  
From out the storied Past, and used  
Within the Present, but transfused  
Thro' Future time by power of  
thought."

Paradoxically, or so it may appear upon superficial consideration, both the strength and the weakness of the Icelanders is his intense individualism. This same trait enabled the flowering of the Greek spirit to reach its fruition during the Golden Age of Greece, but the resultant failure to co-ordinate agencies and activities having similar objectives led to the dissipation of energy to which the subsequent decline of Greek progress and power can at least partially be attributed.

There are in Winnipeg and throughout North America several agencies whose objectives are similar to those of THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN. It is axiomatic that the greater the co-ordination between them, the greater their effectiveness in the accomplishment of transmitting to our virile, young nations the heritage which the aforementioned articles so effectively portray. The history of the organized efforts undertaken by our small ethnic splinter on this continent has been characterized by a tendency to "go it alone". Even to-day the need of greater co-ordination is obvious.

A. V.

## IN THE EDITOR'S CONFIDENCE

Once again we must apologize to a number of our contributors for the postponement of the publication of their articles to our summer issue. Unfortunately the limitations of space made this action imperative. We would like our contributors to know that the postponement of articles does not in any way imply unfavorable comparison with articles we decide to publish in a current issue. Our decision "to publish or postpone" is based on other factors previously indicated in this column.

For the benefit of prospective contributors, we would like to reiterate our continuing need of articles, long or short, dealing with a variety of topics from the highly philosophical to shorter items of local and personal interest. We particularly welcome the latter, especially news items.

It must be remembered that the Editorial Board and Magazine Committee consists of busy people who voluntarily devote their few spare moments to the task of maintaining as high a standard of journalism as is possible under the circumstances. Whatever deficiencies exist—and we are aware of a number—may be attributed in part to the limitation of time. We accordingly solicit the support and assistance of our many friends who sympathize with the objectives of our magazine.

o o o

We beg the indulgence of our readers in publishing excerpts from letters we have received recently:

### From New York

"You will be interested to learn that our classes in beginners' and intermediate (advanced) Icelandic are very well attended. The teacher has been Mr. Sigurður Magnússon, a young Ice-

landic student in New York, and he's doing an excellent job. We had ten students last semester, when the course was given here, and we expect that all of these registrants will continue and that the new elementary class will be as large. We use Prof. Einarsson's textbook with texts, glossary and notes."

### From the Atlantic Coast

"For my money, your best issue so far is the one that just came, Winter 1954, with SKÁLHOLT by Professor Sigurbjörn Einarsson; AUSTMANNA-DALUR by Kristján Eldjárn. So here are \$4.00 of the said money for ten (10) copies.

**Suggestion:** Get Dr. Oleson to translate the chapter on the Romans in Iceland from GENGID Á REKA."

We received the following letter, accompanied by a cheque for \$20.00, from a non-Icelandic California friend:

Gentlemen:—

"I am intensely interested in your efforts to keep alive the Icelandic traditions in Canada, particularly of the oncoming generation. May I hand you herewith the widow's mite toward your work. I would suggest its use in sending sample copies with request to subscribe, wherever you can get lists of particularly Icelanders, and if not, other Scandinavians. After all, the Viking tradition is behind all of them, is it not?"

### From the West Coast

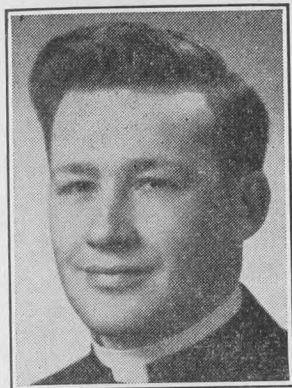
"His article (Ho—Sockeye!) is certainly a true and excitingly written description of salmon fishing. We could almost feel the tang of the salt spray and see the fish jumping just as he described it." —A. V.



## *Our Icelandic Heritage*

Rev. S. T. Guttormsson

A speech to THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN CLUB, January 21, 1955.



Rev. S. T. Guttormsson

There are several reasons why it is an honor for me to speak here tonight. First, while I am not much of an Icelandic, you have invited me to speak to your Icelandic Canadian Club. I am reminded of the time my wife and I attended a certain function. While we were there, an elderly gentleman came up and introduced himself. In the course of our short conversation, he asked my wife if she were an Icelandic. My wife, of course, said that she was not, and before she had a chance to say what she was, the old man shook his head and said, "Ya, that is too bad;" He then went away, saying it over and over to himself. Others have said the same to me when I have been forced to admit that I could neither speak, understand, read nor write Icelandic. I have been told, time and again, that I am a poor Icelandic. You do me an honor to consider me worthy to address your Icelandic Canadian Club.

Second, I am a foreigner in your midst, a stranger within your gates; I am not a Canadian. Yet you of the Icelandic Canadian Club have received my wife and me with the warmest hospitality. That is an honor.

Finally, I am a minister. I have heard it is a risk at any time to ask a minister to speak. They are notoriously ready and willing, but not always able! And there is the added risk that if a minister does speak, he is likely to preach a sermon. Realizing this, and knowing that leopards cannot change their spots, you have taken the risk. I consider that an honor, and a privilege I will try not to abuse.

In all sincerity then, let me thank you for these honors. But above all, I am grateful for the opportunity you are giving me to express some of my feelings and thoughts about our Icelandic heritage. This is an opportunity I have long coveted.

There are some elements of that heritage that we merely accept or enjoy. There are other elements that present responsibilities to us. After all, our Icelandic heritage is a channel through which some tremendously valuable gifts have come to us. It is our responsibility to use them well and to pass them on—untarnished and undimmed by misuse or neglect. We need to understand and use these gifts properly today because the world is in need of them.

First among the gifts we have

received through our heritage is the characteristically Icelandic respect for the truth. By this I **do not** mean mere honesty, but rather a burning curiosity to see life as it is, a curiosity that is not clouded with self-consciousness. To put this in another way—I believe that one of the precious qualities of the Icelandic people is their unrelenting desire to know and understand things as they actually are.

Of course, we have no priority on it. Philosophers have called it the "Search for Truth". When we put it that way it sounds old-fashioned and trite. It smacks of Don Quixote tilting at windmills. The important thing is that the world stands in dire need today of this very quality that I describe as a characteristically Icelandic respect for truth.

To describe one of the fields that needs this respect for truth, let us consider the modern concept of man. People generally assume that man is now at the peak of his development. The standard of living, at least in this part of the world, is higher than ever before. Yet in many respects we are living in the "dark age of the machine". Let me illustrate:

Some time ago, the pilot of a commercial airliner prepared to make his approach to the landing-strip of an airfield in adverse weather conditions. It had to be an instrument approach. Everything went well until he was just about to put the ship down. Then suddenly the control tower ordered him back into the air again. . .his approach was way off! He circled the field a few times and tried again . . . and again he was way off! He tried the third time and was prevented. He was determined the fourth time and came on in anyway. The result was another tragic crash in which a number of

people were killed. The point is that the pilot never tried coming in using his own instincts and sense perceptions, even when he knew his instruments were unreliable. He didn't trust himself.

This is the spirit of the age . . . we worship the machine! The only really fallible element in society is **man** . . the machine can do no wrong.

Or think of the recent elections in the U. S. It was a mechanical field-day. They prepared the great new computing machines for the event. These are the machines that can work in a few moments a complex problem that would take many men many years to solve. These machines were to predict the outcome of the elections. Of course, they failed. The next morning the commentators told us how it was . . . men had fed the wrong statistics and questions into the mechanical brains. Man was wrong again, man, the weak and fallible! I couldn't help smiling when I realized that the situation was really ironical . . . this was, after all, a man telling us why the machine had failed.

Do we really know what man is? His senses and abilities have been stretched beyond imagination. His eyes are sharper and they see farther than ever before. He has the microscope, the telescope, and now television. He hears more than ever . . . has high fidelity sound-reproducing systems, radio, and the telephone. There are innumerable gadgets to strengthen and extend the power of his fingers and hands. His feet are now the automobile, the bus, the train, the airplane . . . and with them he travels farther, faster than ever.

But still the man is a mystery. His truth is not known. The billboards proclaim that he is little more than a

consuming animal. They try to tell me that I am nothing but an eater, therefore I should eat some kind or other of breakfast food. Or that I am a sleeper, and I need this kind of mattress. Or that I am a drinker, and must have this beverage in my home. Or that I am nothing more than a driver, and therefore must have this machine to drive.

I, for one, rebel against these great lies and misconceptions of our time, that we are things, statistics, consuming animals . . . this and nothing more. I like to think that I rebel because I am an Icelander, but whether I am an Icelander or not, a citizen of the United States or not, I think man is more than this. He may have weakness, he may be fallible, yet he has the spark of creativity and the wonder of reflective thought in him. He is cast in the very likeness of God.

It is important then that we make use of our characteristically Icelandic respect for the truth, because it is this respect for truth alone that can bring man's understanding of himself back into proper focus.

But of course there is the famous twin Icelandic characteristic. If the Icelander has a respect for truth, he is also filled with a spirit of independence. You may or may not have liked Halldór Laxness' book, but you must admit the name was good: the Icelanders are an "Independent People". Well, the world is certainly deficient in that spirit today.

Take for instance the spectacle of modern education. Conformity is the keyword of education in our day. The student is not only expected to meet standards, but a **certain set of standards**. If only we attend the prescribed number of classes, absorb and retain the required number of facts, and re-

produce them in a manner in keeping with the desires of our instructors . . . then we are educated people! There are many persons walking up and down the world in this day who have a slip of paper to proclaim the fact they are educated people, a fact that is reflected neither in their ability to conduct constructive lives, nor in their ability to reach conclusions or make decisions for themselves.

On the other hand, it has been characteristic of the Icelanders that they have always respected and admired the man who has earned for himself by hard labor that which too many of us have received by the "spoon-feeding" of modern education. For education does not mean merely the ability to absorb, retain, and reproduce facts. An educated man is not a sponge! An educated man is one who is so disciplined that he can not only think, but think for himself! He is, above all, an independent man!

Of course I recognize, as do most of us, that the independent spirit of the Icelanders has often won for him a bad name. His independence of spirit has often degenerated into an immovable stubbornness. But as we look back in the history of the Icelandic people to see this spirit at its best, we cannot help but admire it. It is a spirit tempered with integrity, unfettered by selfishness or self-interest, and it is a spirit that is lit with willingness to communicate.

Do we need this spirit of independence today? . . . We are living in a time of extremes; two outstanding examples are Communism and McCarthyism. The nature of these extremes is such that they would reduce all men to a paralyzing common denominator of thought and action. We **ought** to have the indepen-

dence of spirit and thought that would prompt us to cry out, "A plague on both your houses!" Yet, actually we have become the prize for which these very forces compete! The Icelandic spirit of independence could do much to restore sanity and balance to this battle of ideologies and systems.

There is a third gift of our heritage that is not so easily recognized, but nevertheless, is the most important of all. I am one of those who profess a great admiration for what we have come to know as the "pioneering spirit" of our fathers. The bulwark of that pioneering spirit was singleness of purpose. I choose to call it life commitment. Even when you recognize the economic problems that made the migration of Icelanders to this country necessary, still those problems do not account for the determination and tenacity with which these valiant people met the difficulties of settling in a strange and often unfriendly land. These people had committed their lives in a venture that often demanded everything from them and returned little or nothing. If there has been any victory in this venture it is because they were willing to stake their lives on the outcome.

The machine worship of our age and the almost universal requirement of conformity to prescribed thoughts, standards, and attitudes have combined to bring about the disintegration of the personality. Psychology's key-word yesterday was, "frustration", today it is "anxiety". The bookstores are filled with books intended either to distract us or teach us how to live at peace with ourselves and attain happiness and success. In many respects we are a "Peer Gynt" civilization. We have been asking, "What is the way?" and have not found it. We have been

asking, "Who am I?", and have heard no answer. We have tried our hands at any number of different intriguing tasks and have not found fulfillment.

The symbol of Peer Gynt is the onion. Remember that scene in the 5th act of the drama? He is looking back over his life. He says, "This is one standpoint. Where is the next? One should try all things and choose the best. I have done that; I've been Caesar, and now I'm behaving like Nebuchadnezzar . . . You absurd old humbug! You're an onion! Now, my dear Peer, I'm going to peel you, however little you may enjoy it!" Then he proceeds to peel the onion, and layer after layer comes off . . . each one symbolic of some attempt that failed or dream that was lost. Finally there is nothing left. Peer is amazed to find that there is no kernel of the onion, there are only layers.

Most of us are like Peer Gynt, or the onion. We have no kernel or purpose or commitment as the unifying principle of our lives. Nor are we abnormal in the world of our time. And how unlike our forbears! They lived committed lives. Their singleness of purpose provided them with a reason for seeking the truth. It became for them the very treasure that the spirit of independence was intended to protect. It was the unifying purpose of their lives.

Now, I have tried to bring to your attention some of the elements of our Icelandic heritage that are dearest to me. I do not claim that we Icelanders can change the world by adhering to them. Nor do I claim that they are automatically ours because we are Icelanders, for Goethe said—a heritage must be earned. But I do say this: We must make these exceedingly worthy and precious gifts of our fathers come



alive in our lives. It is our responsibility that we keep them alive. We must not pass them on to our children as cold, dead ashes, but as burning torches.

**REV. S. T. GUTTORMSSON.** Born June 12, 1925 at Minneota, Minnesota. Parents: Rev. and Mrs. Guttormur Guttormsson. Brought up and educated in Minneota. Upon graduation enlisted in the United States Navy. Called into active service in August, 1943. Volunteered for submarine duty, and early in 1945 was assigned to the crew of the submarine U.S.S. SEAL, and served aboard her until discharged from Navy in January, 1946.

Enrolled at St. Olaf Lutheran College, Northfield, Minn. in 1946. Sang for two years in the world famous St. Olaf Lutheran Choir. Graduated from St. Olaf in 1949, and entered the Northwest Lutheran Seminary that fall. Graduated in 1952, and was ordained in June of that year, having received a call from the newly organized congregation at Cavalier, N., Dakota. Began pastorate in July, 1952. Since ordination has served the Icelandic Lutheran Synod in several ways, and is now serving as Stewardship Secretary of the Synod.

Married Miss Mary-Lou Jones of Minneota on March 10, 1945 (while still in the navy). They have four children: Stefan Paul (7 years old), Mary Bjorg (5), Susan Thordis (3), and Elizabeth Aldis (1).

## Winner of Two Musical Scholarships



Edith Lillian Lewis

Last fall **Edith Lillian Lewis**, age 13, was awarded the Jon Sigurdson Chapter I.O.D.E. Music Scholarship of \$50.00 for highest marks in piano Grade VII, at the Chapter meeting November 12th.

This scholarship is offered annual-

ly to a pupil of Icelandic descent, in music, piano, violin or vocal, in grade six to eleven.

At a meeting of the Chapter at the home of the Regent, Mrs. B. S. Benson, the Educational Secretary, Mrs. E. W. Perry made the presentation.

Edith also won the "Swedish Musical Club, Norðen Society and Order of Vasa" scholarship, for highest marks in the province of Manitoba (90), in grade VII piano.

Edith, a grade IX student at River Heights school, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. M. G. Lewis, 687 Campbell St., Winnipeg, and the great granddaughter of the highly admired composer, Jon Fridfinnson. Her mother is Lillian, daughter of Hall-dor Baldwin, jeweller, and his wife, Emily (Fridfinnson) Baldwin.

Edith's brother, Gordon, age 9, won highest award for vocal music, two years ago, at the Winnipeg music festival, in class of boys under 9 years.



## A PIONEER

by LENA THORLEIFSON

She was nineteen. The winter in the northern part of the little island in the North Atlantic, Iceland, had been very severe. Death had claimed brother, sister and father. The little turf-hut was cold and the larder bare. "If only Bossie would release her offspring and fill the pail with good, rich milk! That would help a little", thought the family. "Children", said the mother. "The agent from America was here this fall. You remember how he pictured the rolling prairies, the thick bush, and the rich waters. Let us, all of us, leave this summer, and start a-fresh in America."

There was rejoicing, and there were tears, for how could they leave the old home that had served their forefathers from generation to generation? Oh, to leave the many little beauty spots, the sweet-smelling lowlands, the clear rills, the purple mountains and everything!

In the summer of 1876 Borga with her four sisters, brother-in-law, and mother completed the six-week trip by various modes of travel, pony, steamship, train and flat-blottomed boat. They were greeted in Winnipeg by a few countrymen who had arrived the year before. The destination of these several hundred immigrants was the region on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, fifty-six miles north of Winnipeg, then a small town compared to the present metropolis.

The immigrants with their boxes and sacks were conveyed by barge to their new abode at Gimli. On their arrival they found that no houses were available, not even tents, nothing but

the beautiful sky above, the heavy bush in front, and the clear shining lake behind.

Before long the woods echoed and re-echoed, for logs were being cut and trimmed for the much-needed shelters. Bits of nets were cast and delicious fish cooked by open fires made the meal.

Winter set in, but as everyone was everyone's neighbor, families were fairly comfortable in their little log cabins. Log stables housed one or two cows granted by the government to the destitute settlers. All went well until the spring, when the whole community was placed under a quarantine for small-pox. Very few homes escaped, and dear ones were placed under the sod. Borga lost two older sisters the same week.

Two years of hardship drove all who could leave home to seek their fortunes nearby or in Winnipeg. Borga with two young girls started off on the long walk of fifty-six miles. On their arrival in Winnipeg they all entered service.

What a time mistress and maid had when neither understood the other! What funny little incidents created smiles, and now to recall them, laughs!

"Dress the chicken, Sarah". (Her mistress shortened her name, Sigurborg, to (Sarah). Sarah, in absolute bewilderment wondered why her mistress wanted to put clothes on the chicken.

"Scrub the floor, Sarah, please." Again bewilderment, for incidentally, the word 'floor' in Icelandic means

the main aisle in the barn, behind the cows.

However, Sarah saw the happy side all through life, and laughed off the many mistakes. Little by little she learned to understand the daily routine.

Late in the fall the return trip was made on foot, but with a four-footed companion, a young cow, representing the summer's wages. The little travelling bag was not very heavy, only two gingham gowns having been added to the wardrobe. New shoes were viewed in the window of a little store, but no, the home-made sheep-skin shoes would serve the purpose. Another year, perhaps, she would return, and this time the wages would be a little higher, and she would not have to contribute as much to the family home.

Winnipeg was growing and willing hands found work quite easily. Then as now young people with that far-away look were migrating to the city. After a few years on the homestead, Borga with her two sisters, brother-in-law and mother moved to Winnipeg. Everybody worked, either by the day or washed in the home. In a short time a laundry was started, and though there were breaks in the family and little nephews and nieces arrived, the work continued.

Borga married in 1884 and in 1888 pioneered near Grund in the Baldur district. Hard work, thrift and happiness brought the family over all obstacles.

Old Buck and Bright, the oxen had ploughed a few acres; the small herd had multiplied, and the family had increased to six girls, a happy, contented group. Borga taught them all to see the bright side of life, and to feel that no matter what happened God was always with them. That beautiful belief carried her over her

Gethsemane, when in 1898 her loved one, the father of her little brood was taken away after many weeks' illness.

Help came in many ways. Neighbors were kind. Some took the cattle for wintering, others the children for schooling, and one very kindly moved Borga's shanty to his own farm and donated two cows for her own use. With her spinning wheel and knitting needles Borga met her direct needs, though not alone, for each day, as in answer to her prayers, some one or something cropped up to render aid. She never feared the morrow. "God will take care of me if I do my best." Her daughters grew up, helped her a little, married, and the grandchildren, one by one, loved "amma" (grandmother). They loved to visit her in her little home, where the whir of the spinning wheel and the click of the needles spelled happy rythm to her contented and thankful nature.

Borga lived her three score years and ten, and a few more in fair health. Only the last two found her confined to her bed, having failed to recover from an accident. While bed-ridden she was the same heroic person as in the early days, and death found her with an expression of peace and contentment.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE -

The subject of this article, Mrs. Sigurborg Gottfred, was born in Iceland in 1857. She died at Langruth, Manitoba, in 1937.

The hardships and privations of pioneering life, and the noble self-sacrifice of the pioneers are vividly portrayed in this article written by Mrs. Gottfred's daughter, Mrs. Lena Thorleifson. In so far as it depicts the simple everyday experiences of a typical pioneering lady, and affords some intimate glimpses of everyday incidents in the life of the people of a half-forgotten era, it has a definite historical value. Living in an environment of relative ease and comfort, we can draw inspiration from the courage of such women as Mrs. Gottfred whose spiritual strength was the forerunner of material progress. A. V.

## *A Pilgrimage to Norseland*

by PROFESSOR RICHARD BECK

As already reported in *The Icelandic Canadian*, Mrs. Beck and I had the great pleasure of spending the past summer in Scandinavia, largely in Iceland and Norway, with shorter visits to Denmark and Sweden. This was the realization of a long-cherished dream on our part, and it is pleasant to report, in all truthfulness, that the reality in this case surpassed the dream, due in no small measure to the warm-hearted reception which we were accorded by our relatives and others, publicly and privately, for which we shall ever be deeply grateful.

Our journey was in the nature of a pilgrimage, in the sense that we were particularly interested in visiting places where great events in the history of the Northern countries, notably Iceland and Norway, had occurred, places which, therefore, in many cases, have become veritable national shrines, surrounded by hallowed memories which stir the imagination and warm the hearts of the people to whom they belong. Along with such national shrines of various kinds, we were likewise especially interested in visiting museums and related institutions where the cultural history of the nations of the North is strikingly recorded in remarkable archaeological finds or other visible remnants from ancient or more recent times.

Let no one think, however, that we were so absorbed in the past that we neglected paying attention to present-day life, social progress, and contemporary cultural achievements in the Scandinavian countries. Nothing of the kind. But because of our Icelandic

origin, we desired to make use of the rare opportunity which was ours during the past summer in the lands of forbears, to learn, first hand, as much as possible about our racial and cultural background; it is still the better part of wisdom to know oneself.

On board "Hekla" of the Icelandic Airlines (Loftleiðir) we flew from New York to Reykjavík in the afternoon of June 1, arriving about noon the next day. It was a thrilling experience to travel in an airplane owned by Icelanders, manned by an Icelandic crew, and flying the Icelandic flag. It was a striking illustration of the great material progress which has taken place in Iceland in recent years in the realm of modern transportation and communications as well as in other fields of activity.

Approaching Iceland from the air is a memorable experience. However, as this was Mrs. Beck's first visit to her ancestral country, I prefer to give you her first impression of Iceland. In a recent address she described our arrival at Reykjavík as follows:

"As the plane circled the airfield for a landing. I was amazed at the beauty of the landscape below:—The beautiful colors of the mountains, the lush green of the coastal plain, the deep blue of the ocean with white surf beating against dark rocks. Somehow I was not quite prepared for all this. I had often heard my husband describe Iceland, but I thought his descriptions were some nostalgic dreams."

I am happy to add that this first impression on her part was confirmed and strengthened through seeing at a

closer range the varied scenic beauty of Iceland in all its glory. Let it be added that we flew, literally speaking, into that "nightless world", which Iceland enjoys in the spring of the year and early summer, and which its poets, not least our own Stephan G. Stephansson, have described in a graphic and memorable fashion, although its enchantment is in reality indescribable, and must be experienced. Small wonder that Mrs. Beck found it difficult to sleep during her first nights in Iceland. The bright daylight at night simply kept her awake!

Thanks to modern means of transportation, and no less thanks to the generosity of the Icelandic government, as well as of various institutions and organizations and numerous friends, we were able in a relatively short time to travel extensively throughout Iceland and visit noted historical places and beauty spots.

The air has become the highway of the Icelanders, and will be that in a still greater degree in the future. Last year, for instance, the Icelandic Airways (Flugfélag Íslands) carried fifty thousand passengers on its domestic flights. We flew from Reykjavík (in the South) to Ísafjörður (in the Northwest) and returned, from Reykjavík to the East Fjords, and from Akureyri and Sauðárkrókur in the North to Reykjavík; and as the weather generally was favorable, we saw Iceland from the air in all its scenic grandeur, and no one has really seen how impressive it is, and unlike other countries, unless he has viewed it from the air on a sunny summerday.

However, unique and unforgettable as Iceland is seen from the air, one must, nevertheless, travel on land and

visit the various historic and scenic places, in order to see them in their right environment and to full advantage. Travelling by car, we were enabled to do just this in an unusually large measure.

In the afternoon of our first Sunday in Iceland, which was Whitsunday and a truly beautiful day, we drove to Þingvellir (Plains of the Parliament) as the guests of Dr. Alexander Jóhannesson, President of the University of Iceland, and Mrs Jóhannesson. Located some thirty miles east from Reykjavík, the Þingvellir region is one of unusual grandeur: a sunken lava-plain, wrought in ages past by volcanic fires and earthquakes, "It has a wild beauty of vertical walls, foaming cataracts and water-filled chasms". Snow-capped mountains rise majestically on the horizon, and on the south side the plain is bordered by the silvery waters of a large lake, Þingvallavatn. No word picture does justice to the uniqueness of the scene. Lord Dufferin, visiting the place, said it was worth going around the world to see.

In this impressive amphitheatre, outdoors, the Icelandic parliament (Alþing) met from 930 to 1800. On that stage, set in the grandest natural surroundings, were enacted the most important events in the history of the Icelandic nation: The Founding of the Icelandic Republic of old in 930, and the introduction of Christianity to Iceland in the year 1000. More recently, there was commemorated in 1930 the 1000th anniversary of the Icelandic Alþing, and there also came true the long-cherished dream of freedom of the Icelandic nation with the re-establishment of the Icelandic Republic in 1944. No wonder that, as we stood on that historic spot last summer and contemplated its central

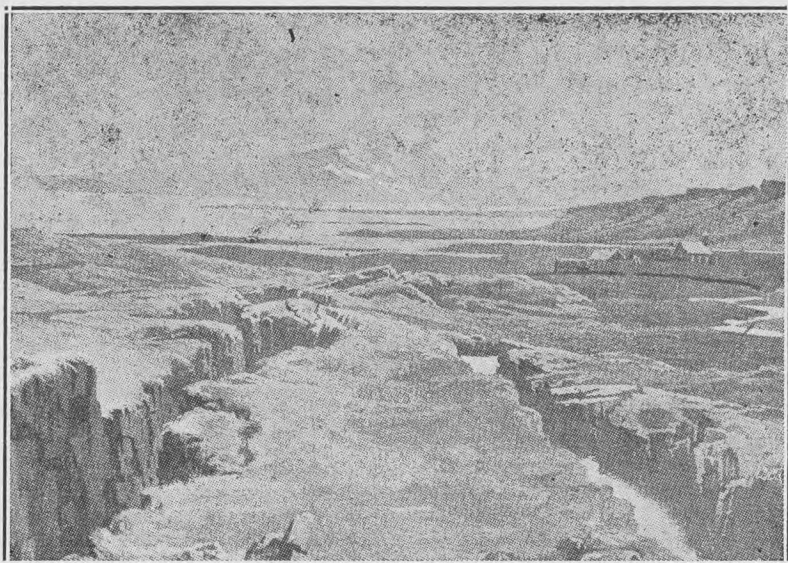


place in the history of the Icelandic nation, we felt that we were standing on sacred ground.

Later in June, together with Dr. and Mrs. Harald Sigmar and Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, of the Lutheran World Council, we were the guests of Bishop Ásmundur Guðmundsson on a delightful trip to two of the greatest scenic wonders of Iceland, Geysir and Gull-

its yard neatly walled with lava blocks, lies far below. White sheep are straggling down a road of Tyrian blue. Sunlight glints on the quiet water of Tungufljót."

Set in the framework of that magnificent environment, Geysir at first lies cradled in its 60 feet wide bowl, its deep blue water boiling vigorously. Then, helped along by a large dose of



**Pingvellir**

foss. In her excellent book, **Iceland: New World Outpost** (New York, 1948) Mrs. Agnes Rothery has truthfully and graphically described the impressive surroundings of Geysir in the following passage:

"Seventy miles from Reykjavík, a rocky plateau overlooks the lovely Haukadalur. Mountains touched with darkest purple shade down to coppery tones as they meet the red earth. They make a circle around the horizon, changing to amethyst, with green shrubbery marking darker lines down the slopes. A three-gabled farm house, with red roof and turf outbuildings,

thick soap, poured into it by the custodian, in due time it responds with a tremendous eruption, flinging the huge column of water 150 to 200 feet in the air. With a brief interval, this continued for 15 minutes. We had witnessed one of Geysir's great performances, truly a majestic sight, never to be forgotten.

Gullfoss (The Golden Waterfall), near Geysir on the Hvítá River, is generally regarded as Iceland's most beautiful waterfall, of which there are many. The river rushes over two great ledges of rocks some 65 feet down into a deep gorge, forming the mighty and



beautiful waterfall. On a sunny day many rainbows can be seen above the fall, indeed an inspiring and unforgettable sight.

From this memorable trip we returned to Reykjavík by way of Þingvellir, again feasting our eyes, and our soul, on its rare grandeur and hearing once more the voices from the past reverberate from its sacred rocks. On our return trip that lovely summer eve we experienced the response to the Icelandic scene, which Mrs. Rothery has described so beautifully in her book on Iceland:

"In the evening summer light the yellow moss that lies like golden lace upon the black velvet sides of the mountains gives back a reflected light. The moss ripples over the meadows in a supersensuous golden glow. Everything is softened and illumined by this delicate shimmer, bright as buttercups in the sun, intricate as filigree, stretching for miles and miles."

At the invitation of the University of Iceland, in early July, we made another most memorable journey to the historic places in Southern Iceland, the scene of famed *Njáls saga*, accompanied by Dr. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson of the University, Mrs. Sveinsson, and Dr. Ludvig Holm-Olsen of the University of Bergen, Norway. Dr. Sveinsson is rightly considered the greatest living authority on *Njáls saga*, and it was a rare experience to visit Hlíðarendi and Bergþórshvöll, respectively the homes of Gunnar and Njáll, under his expert guidance. His authoritative and artistic interpretation of the saga events associated with those hallowed places made the distant past come vividly to life. In that connection I am happy to refer the reader to an excellent description of the *Njáls saga country*, "Sagasteads of Fire and Ice" by Hedin Bronner, published

in the 1955 spring number of *The American-Scandinavian Review*.

The day following our visit to Hlíðarendi and Bergþórshvöll, as the guests of relatives, we visited two other historic places in the same vicinity, Keldur, where Mrs. Beck's relatives have resided for generations and where one of the most interesting and oldest farmhouses in Iceland is preserved and the historic parsonage of Oddi, the famous cultural and literary centre of old.

Nor did we neglect visiting other scenic and historic parts of Iceland. On an automobile journey from my childhood haunts in Eastern Iceland to Akureyri, we visited Iceland's mightiest waterfall, in terms of sheer power and rugged grandeur, "the glorious, thundering, incomparable Dettifoss", in the words of an American writer, a description which hits the mark squarely. Then it is not surprising that leading Icelandic poets have vied with one another in describing this great wonder of nature.

Not far from Dettifoss is Ásbyrgi, a unique natural colosseum, shaped like a gigantic horse's hoof, from which derives the legend that Sleipnir, Odin's renowned steed, had once touched the ground there and left on it his indelible imprint.

As guests of the Icelandic government we visited historic Borgarfjörður, where the scene of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* is laid, stopping on the way at Saurbær in Hvalfjörður, sanctified by the memory of the great hymn-writer, Rev. Hallgrímur Pétursson, and in Borgarfjörður at Reykholt, the home of the historian Snorri Sturlason, of world renown, and at Borg, the home of Eggil Skallagrímsson, equally famed for his heroic deeds and his immortal achievements in the realm of poetry.

Accompanied by Dr. Páll Kolka and Mrs. Kolka of the town of Blönduós we visited historic places in Húnavatns-sýsla and Skagafjörður, both of which are noted for their scenic beauty, not neglecting, of course, to pay our respects to Stephan G. Stephansson at his statue on Vatnsskarð, where he stands guard over his native district which he has immortalized in his poems.

Continuing to Siglufjörður in the North, at the invitation of the City Commission, we stopped on the way at Hólar in Hjaltadal, the long-time bishopric of the North of Iceland, with which some of the greatest names in the history of Iceland are associated.

Earlier in the summer we had visited Ísafjörður in the West, as guests of the Grand Lodge of the Icelandic Good Templars and of the City, and in the course of that visit we had seen a striking manifestation of the "nightless world", previously referred to. Returning from a party at about one o'clock in the morning, we noticed a peculiar glow on the mountain side, there were soft reds and yellows, and rosy tints underneath. "That", said our host, "is the sunset and the sunrise coming together."

On the journey to the Northland, at Sauðárkrókur on the shore of Skagafjörður, we came, however, closest to seeing the Midnight Sun itself. At a farewell banquet there I rose at Midnight to respond to a toast to the Western Icelanders, and as I looked out the window beside me, I saw the fading crimson of evening and the glow from the rising sun merge into a sea of shimmering light. Nature had provided me with my text in the inspiring words of Stephan G. Stephansson, which can be paraphrased as follows: "Do not let your mind or your

heart grow old; be a friend of the evening sun and a son of the dawn."

For us it was both an unforgettable experience and a source of lasting inspiration to learn to know Iceland, the land itself, in all its scenic grandeur, and drink deep of its fountains of historic memories, so richly abundant. Nor was it a lesser source of pleasure for us to learn to know the Icelandic nation, its culture and manifold present-day activities. And we were privileged to visit Iceland during an unusually historic summer. One major event followed another.

The annual Seaman's Day (Sjómannadagurinn), always an important event to a seafaring nation like the Icelanders, was this year especially significant. Observed on June 13, it was not only commemorated with a most festive program, but climaxed by the laying of the cornerstone of a new and beautiful Seamen's Home, at which His Excellency Ásgeir Ásgeirsson, President of Iceland officiated.

Then came the high point of the summer's special festivities, the celebration throughout the country, on June 17, of the 10th anniversary of the re-establishment of the Icelandic Republic. The observance in Reykjavík, the capital, was most elaborate and impressive, including parades, special church services, addresses by leaders of the nation, sports, and ending with dancing in the streets, strikingly illustrative of the joyous spirit of the people on this happy occasion.

Another outstanding event of the summer was the consecration of Dr. Ásmundur Guðmundsson as the bishop of Iceland, which took place in the venerable Cathedral at Reykjavík, beautifully re-decorated for that historic occasion. As might be expected, the ceremony was marked by great dignity, attended by the President of

Iceland, other governmental leaders, foreign representatives, a very large number of clergy, and the general public. All in all a most memorable occasion. In the evening, the Minister of Education and Church Affairs, Steingrímur Steinþórsson, gave a magnificent banquet in honor of the new bishop and his wife.

The annual Skálholtshátíð, held on July 18, and as always at Skálholt itself, for centuries the famed seat of the bishopric in the south of Iceland, was also an unusually memorable one, for Skálholt is now rising from its ruins in a twofold sense of the word. In the first place, investigations under way there have unearthed some very important historic relics; secondly, thanks to the contributions of the Icelandic government and the untiring efforts of interested individuals, this ancient historic site, long neglected, will now be restored, so that a church, worthy of the rich traditions of the place, will have been erected there when the 900th anniversary of the founding of Skálholt bishopric will be commemorated in 1956. (For an excellent account of Skálholt, see the detailed and authoritative article under that title by Próf. Sigurbjörn Einarsson, in Judge W. J. Lindal's splendid translation in the winter 1954 number of *The Icelandic Canadian*.)

Iceland is not, however, only a land of varied and impressive scenic beauty and of notable historic places and relics. It is as well the home of a modern nation, which, though numbering only 150 thousand, lives a rich cultural life and is advancing rapidly in other realms of activities.

Icelandic literature, both in verse and prose, flourishes abundantly, as does Icelandic theatrical art, with its banner held high both by the National Theatre (Þjóðleikhúsið) and the

Dramatic Society of Reykjavík (Leikfélag Reykjavíkur). Nor can anyone visit the Museum of Art in the National Museum without realizing that modern Icelandic art, painting and sculpture alike, is both varied and noteworthy in many respects.

Speaking of Icelandic art, it need hardly be emphasized that no one should journey to Iceland without visiting in Reykjavík the Museum of Einar Jónsson, the great sculptor, who passed away last fall, leaving his nation a monumental heritage of works of art, marked by striking originality and commensurate inspirational and symbolic quality.

Both the National Theatre and the National Museum in Reykjavík, built in the course of the past few years, do great honor to the Icelandic people. The latter contains much material that throws bright light on the history and the cultural development of the nation; among its most significant features is a special section devoted to the memory of Jón Sigurðsson, Iceland's great statesman and leader in its struggle for regained freedom (Minjasafn Jóns Sigurðssonar).

No less impressive and amazing to me was the material progress which has taken place in Iceland since my visit there ten years ago. Not only Reykjavík, now a city of 60,000 inhabitants, is largely heated by hot water from the hot springs in the vicinity, but more and more towns are getting hot water out of the ground. Rivers and waterfalls are increasingly being harnessed for the production of electricity, and long-range plans are under way for electrifying nearly all the country within the next ten years.

Last year a fertilizer plant, located at Gufunes near Reykjavík, was completed and began producing fertilizer (nitrogen) from the air. It was built

with financial aid from the Mutual Security Agency. At Akranes a cement factory is under construction, the special sand needed being pumped from the bottom of the fjord in the vicinity. In that fashion the Icelandic people are in various ways making fuller use of its natural resources.

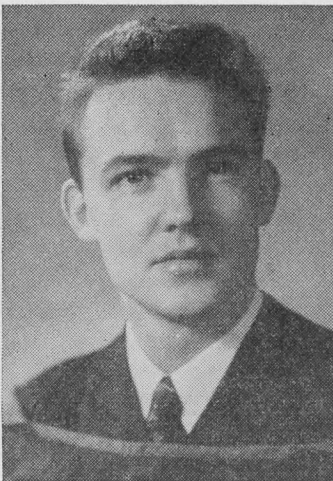
Naturally, the Icelanders, in common with the rest of the world, have their problems, one of greatest of which is an inflation threatening the economy of the country. Withal, they face the future courageously. A thoroughly modern nation, they stand firmly on their historical foundation, ready to co-operate with other nations, as far as circumstances permit, yet maintain their close ties, culturally and otherwise, with the sister nations of the North.

The national character of the Ice-

landic people and the spirit in which it faces the turbulent present and the unknown future are well and correctly evaluated in the following paragraph from Mrs. Rothery's book, previously referred to in this article:

"But man is still more important than even his greatest inventions, and Icelandic history is the account of a nation of men—not many, and enacting their drama on a small stage—but men with a passion for learning and willingness to sacrifice to obtain it; with a passion for freedom and the ability to win it and to handle it after it is won."

EDITOR'S NOTE — The foregoing is the first of two articles by Dr. Beck based on the recent visit of Dr. and Mrs. Beck to the Scandinavian countries. The second article, dealing mostly with the Norwegian phase of their pilgrimage will appear in the Summer Issue of THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN.



Archibald Charles Orr

Archibald Charles Orr graduated from the University of British Columbia, in May 1954, in Engineering Physics, and secured the B.Sc. degree. While in high school he was an outstanding student, and was awarded the Lions' Cup for scholar-

ship as well as an honor award for contributing to school life and welfare, and a gold "K" pin for school service.

Archie is the son of Archibald and Thorgjorg (Sigurdson) Orr, of Vancouver.

★

Dorothy Merle Kristjanson was elected Lady Stick for her class at the University of Manitoba last fall. She graduated in Arts in the spring of 1953 and secured the degree of B.A..

After teaching for one year she entered the University of Manitoba to study for a degree in Education. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. Kristjanson, at 499 Camden Place, Winnipeg.

★

Donald Kenneth Johnson, won the \$200.00 Manitoba Hotelmen's and Brewers' Scholarship for the second time in 1954. He is the son of Fjola, and her late husband, Paul Johnson formerly of Lundar, Man.



# The President of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce



**G. S. Thorvaldson, Q.C.**

Gunnar Solmundur "Solly" Thorvaldson, Q.C., newly elected president of The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, has already begun to establish precedents. He is the first practising lawyer to be president of this nationwide business organization. He is the first Icelandic Canadian to hold the Chamber's top position.

He is also a firm and outspoken individualist who regards the parliamentary tradition of Canada and of his parents' homeland, Iceland, as something worth preserving. And he is alarmed at the growing trend towards giving state interests precedence over rights of the individual.

In his native Manitoba, "Solly" Thorvaldson is one of a large group of Icelandic Canadians who have won distinction in education, the law and public service.

Teachers, deans of colleges, leaders

of the bar, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, and hockey and basketball players are among the Icelandic colony's contributions to its adopted country. "Solly" Thorvaldson ranks high in three categories. He has been and still is a leader of the Manitoba Bar; he will long be remembered in Manitoba as a fearless, independent and outspoken member of the Legislature; and for four years he was captain of the University of Manitoba basketball team playing in competition with the Dominion champion Winnipeg Toilers in what was then regarded as the basketball capital of Canada.

Fifty-three years old and a young-looking man of varied social, political and athletic interests, "Solly" Thorvaldson by his own admission is a poor golfer, a good billiard player and a businessman's lawyer. He prefers the quiet, constructive atmosphere of the corporation board room to the oratory, pleading and excitement of the court. He regards the law as a protection for individual freedom not as a means for wielding government controls.

From Iceland with its thousand years of parliamentary history he inherits a respect for government by publicly-supported law. He believes that while parliaments are necessary to preserve our freedoms, the great opportunity lies in the realms of business and industry where man can exercise his ingenuity and employ his talents and energy to create his own future. This philosophy has directed

<sup>1</sup> On the front cover of the November, 1954 issue of Canadian Business is displayed a picture of G. S. Thorvaldson Q.C., president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. This article is re-printed from the same issue by the kind permission of the publishers.



the course of his public life and led him several years ago to active participation in the activities of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, of which he became president in 1953. It also led him to the national presidency, where he becomes spokesman for business and professional men across Canada who share his belief that business and industry still have much to contribute to the development of this country.

"Solly" Thorvaldson is a native of Riverton, Manitoba, to which small town his parents came just before the turn of the century. His father, Sveinn Thorvaldson, typical of many of his countrymen who had come to make their homes in Canada, believed that good citizenship meant giving as well as receiving. He took an active and enlightened part in local and provincial politics.

With this home background, "Solly" Thorvaldson attended public school in Riverton, collegiate at Saskatoon and the universities of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In 1925, he was called to the Manitoba Bar and became a member of an old and distinguished Winnipeg law firm. Here, he gained distinction in the fields of commercial and tax law. During this period he also developed an interest in the work of the Chamber of Commerce, serving as chairman of its legislation committee, a member of the executive and finally, last year, as president. In 1944 he helped to form the Income Tax Payers' Association, forerunner of the Canadian Tax Foundation.

Today, Mr. Thorvaldson is senior partner in the Winnipeg law firm of Thorvaldson, Eggertson, Bastin and Stringer, president of the International Loan Company and the North American Trust Company, a director of Western Gypsum Products Limited,

and other companies. Business associates and acquaintances in Winnipeg regard him as a first class executive and refer to his chief characteristic as being a natural friendliness which carries all the marks of sincerity and none of the artificial breeziness of the professional back-slapper. His business interest extends far beyond the strictly legal aspects to include marketing, finance, industrial and human relations.

Because political activity attracts more public interest than even the most important or involved business service, "Solly" Thorvaldson is better known in Winnipeg as a defender of individual rights than he is a business executive. In 1932, just seven years out of law school, he made his first bid for election to the Manitoba House. Like his father, he ran for office as a Conservative and was nominated in the predominantly Icelandic community of Gimli.

Conservatism was not too popular in Manitoba in 1932, however, and young Thorvaldson was defeated. But even as a busy lawyer, he still found time to speak out for the things in which he believed and was in constant demand as a speaker for the party he supported. In 1941 after being elected as one of the ten members from Winnipeg, he rose in the House to make his maiden speech.

Politically, Mr. Thorvaldson was never too comfortable in the Manitoba House. The spirit of the House many times ran counter to the new member's fundamental belief in individual initiative. And as a lawyer, he had a keen awareness of how and where some of our basic freedoms can be abridged.

The spectacle of an individual member speaking up in the House in defence of individual rights, the

sweeping hands and the belligerent chin of a determined speaker won admiration and applause but not votes. Outside the House, however, Thorvaldson won recognition. Here was a fighter for the basic principles of democracy. He was invited to contest South Winnipeg in the federal election and he resigned his seat in the Legislature to stand as Conservative candidate.

In the Liberal sweep of 1949, Thorvaldson was defeated and retired, at least temporarily from politics.

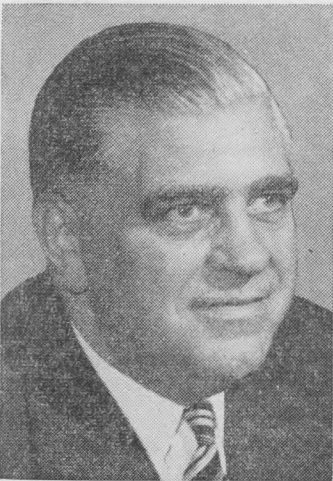
In public life a fighter, Thorvaldson in private life is a gentle soul. His wife, the former Edna Schwitzer, is as active as her husband. In 1953 she was vice-president of the Women's Canadian Club in Winnipeg and she takes a keen interest in community affairs. Her father, the late J. E. Schwitzer, was also an individualist with a record of accomplishment. As chief engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he conceived and built the spiral tunnel

at Trail, B. C., one of the most amazing engineering feats of all time.

A non-championship golfer, "Solly" rejoices today in the success of his daughter, Ruth, who is one of Manitoba's best women players. Nineteen years old, she has been a member of the Manitoba team in inter-provincial competitions for the past three years. She and two other daughters are all graduates of the University of Manitoba.

For real relaxation, "Solly", like many other Manitobans, goes to the marshes. His favorite sport is hunting ducks and grouse and as the owner of a hunting lodge, he claims close acquaintance with all the duck marshes within 100 miles of Winnipeg. He is an expert shot and has unlimited patience.

Lawyer, businessman, sportsman and enthusiast for freedom, "Solly" Thorvaldson is a colorful successor to those who over the years have been "spokesmen for business".



Edward Vopni

Edward Vopni of Winnipeg was named Air Cadet League "Man of the

Year" in a scroll recently presented to him by the R.C.A.F. The honor was in recognition of Mr. Vopni's seven years' service as chairman of the provincial committee.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jón J. Vopni, 597 Bannatyne Ave., Winnipeg.

★

Lorna Stefanson, who was the Collegiate candidate for Carnival queen at the Gimli Ice carnival won the title after defeating two other candidates. Miss Stefanson is in grade 11 in Gimli. The defeated candidates were Kristine Magnusson and L.A.W. Ketty Edwards. The carnival featured skaters from Winnipeg Winter Club and the Gimli Figure Skating Club. The show was sponsored jointly by the R.C.A.F. and the town.

## UTAH ICELANDERS TO CELEBRATE CENTENARY

This year in June the **Icelandic Association of Utah** is sponsoring a three-day festival to commemorate the arrival of the first Icelandic settlers at Spanish Fork, one hundred years ago.

Mr. Pétur Eggerz, of the Icelandic Legation at Washington, D.C., will be Iceland's official representative at the celebrations.

The descendants of the Icelanders in Utah have down through the years held an Icelandic celebration August the second, and last year's event was especially well attended. It was during that celebration that preparations were started for the hundredth anniversary. A committee was elected headed by John Y. Bearnson as president, with vice-presidents Victor Leifson, Faye Bearnson and Byron Gelsion. Secretary-treasurer is Lois B.

Christensen; publicity chairman William M. Johnson; and in charge of musical events is Mrs. Thelma McKell.

The committee has been divided into sub-committees who are in charge of various phases of the program. The event is being artistically and carefully planned and promises to be outstanding in every way. Publicity chairman, Mr. Johnson sends the following invitation to all people of Icelandic descent:

"To commemorate the establishment of the first permanent Icelandic settlement in America, **The Icelandic Association of Utah** extends a gracious invitation to all people of Icelandic descent to join with them in the Icelandic Centennial Celebration to be held June 15-16-17 at Spanish Fork, Utah.



Some of the officers of the committee in charge of the Centennial Celebration at Spanish Fork. L. to r. Byron Gelsion, Faye Bearnson, Victor Leifson, vice-presidents; and John Y. Bearnson, president.

"This settlement was founded by sixteen Icelandic pioneers who came to Utah in the years 1855-56-57.

"The celebration will begin with a religious service June 15th, and will continue on the evening of June 16, and with a full day's program June 17.

"We are very desirous of representation of all Icelandic groups throughout the United States and Canada."

The writer has had close contact with the Utah Icelanders for the last ten years and 7-8 articles have been published about them in the **Icelandic Canadian**\*. Their history is most intriguing and all their cultural activities are of a high standard. The fact that, in spite of isolation, they have retained their interest in Icelandic

cultural tradition for a hundred years, is noteworthy and enhances our admiration for this small contingent of Icelanders who pioneered in Utah and who, by their courage, intelligence, energy and faith helped to make the desert blossom into a land of beauty and of plenty.

No doubt there will be a large influx of Icelandic descendants from all parts of America to enjoy the festivities June 15-17 in Spanish Fork, and to help the Utah pioneers celebrate this unique event.

**Holmfridur Danielson**

\*See **Icel. Can.** vol. 2, No. 2; Vol. 5 No. 4; Vol. 6 Nos. 3 and 4; Vol. 9 No. 1; Vol. 11, No. 3 (two articles).

## Wins Two Scholarships



**Miss Mary White**

**Miss Mary White**, the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. P. White, 1288 Dominion St., Winnipeg, has been awarded two scholarships: one by the Red River Chapter (I.O.D.E.), and the other by the William E.

Gladstone Chapter (I.O.D.E.). The award was based on Mary's outstanding scholastic achievement at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute and at the Manitoba Normal School. Mary will graduate from the latter institution in June.

Mary's mother, Sigríður (Sigurðardóttir) White emigrated as a child from Eyjafjörður, Iceland, in 1910. Three of her older children have graduated from the University of Manitoba with excellent scholastic records.

Mary's sister, Betty, as many will recall, achieved the distinction and honor of receiving an invitation to attend a pre-wedding party for Princess Elizabeth (now Queen Elizabeth) and Prince Philip. An account of her experiences at that historic occasion may be found in the Winter Issue of **The Icelandic Canadian**, 1947.



# THE GAME OF CHANCE

by BERTHA DANIELSON JOHNSON

First Prize in Literary Contest sponsored by The Icelandic Canadian

With canoe and kicker, Bill Hilton headed up the Turbulent River, making slow progress against a current, swift from the impetus of a steep downgrade, for the river had its source in higher elevations to the south, coursing through rugged terrain where the hummocky ridges rose and fell, separated by drift-covered plains, muskegs, and small lakes.

For ten years Bill's crude, unhewn cabin had stood in the timber-shelter, with the Turbulent River rushing past, northward through the Pre-Cambrian region. This was Bill's winter home. Here he was snug with his radio, his maps, and his prospector guides, when the storms blew in from the Arctic and the temperatures dropped to forty or fifty below. The wilderness spoke to him a language that he understood. Each bore its own significance: the hooting owl; the veering gale; and the fur signs that were as plain to Bill as the letters on a printed page. He had known no loneliness until he met Lila Woods, and the memory of her mingled with his prospector dreams of a fabulous Hilton Mine.

Bill had wrested his livelihood from the wilderness, trapping the fur-bearers and living off the land. There had been years of plenty; and lean years, too, when the cycle of furred creatures was at a low ebb, moose was south in the hills, and the caribou had migrated to other haunts. There was a year when caribou did not come. Then hunger stalked in the huts of his Indian neighbors, and he hunted wearily and in vain.

This last had been a good winter,

with a big fur-catch, and high prices. He had made the stake he sought; and Bill had special use for it.

Impatiently, he waited through the swift miracle of May and June that transformed the Northland, with lengthening days and opened waterways, while the Canada geese honked to the Arctic, and all nature pulsed into life.

In those idle days of waiting, the vision of the girl haunted him. He recalled her eyes, blue as a lake on a calm summer's day; her hair, gold as October birches; and her smile: the thought of it set his heart racing, momentarily pushing aside his dream of his fabulous mine.

For two days, Bill snaked his way over the twisting, winding course. At the height of land, where the river cascaded down in the froth of canoe-defying rapids, he turned up the portage to Prospector Lake.

Up its sheer incline, Bill toiled with his canoe. Panting and sweating, he retraced his steps over the three, rough ungraded miles, struggling through the tangle of vines and obstructing wind-falls. Again, and yet again, he bent his back under his pelts, and grub, and bedroll, and outboard.

Bill relaxed his portage-weary limbs while he waited for the kettle to boil. Across the lake, the girl's face beckoned to him, then vanished before his tangible landmark, a solitary lobster on Rocky Island.

Bill crossed the lake, passing close by Rocky Island as he had always done. Across the channel, the far shore lay fringed in last year's rushes, dried and

sere. Behind them gloomed a grove of evergreens and shadowy willows, against a background of boulders, barred by the icy touch of glaciers, and the persistent erosion of the ages. Bill's spirit soared at the sight. His weariness dropped from him like a worn-out parka. His heart throbbed with a rival love—the lure of rocks. Before him, in the bouldered ridges lay his mining claims.

Bill pulled in to the old pier and began the task of unloading. Once again, like so many past summers, he pitched his tent.

He was barely up next morning when he heard the drone of the plane in the distance. He had rested well in his bedroll under the mosquito bar. He ate his simple meal with the view of the unruffled lake before him. In the trees nearby two robins trilled; a tern flapped out across the bay; and already a dozen gadflies buzzed on silver wings.

But Bill did not share the tranquillity of the morning. There was a restless expectancy about him. Tense, he puffed at his pipe impatiently.

Presently, the plane swooped low above him. Then he saw it settle, like a travel-weary bird, and taxi to the rickety old dock before his camp.

A sudden new energy seized Bill. His rugged features lit up in a welcoming grin as Tom Brady, and bush pilot, Matt Kern, climbed out of the cockpit.

"You fellows are up early," he greeted.

"We brought the drill," Tom said. "And your mail."

Bill scanned the contents of his single letter.

"I noticed some old mining claims are running out," he said. "Worthless, anyhow. Not a showing on them."

He felt a pang of disappointment.

Lila had promised to let him hear where she was and how she was doing.

"They say you got a mine here all right," Kern broke in on his thoughts of the girl.

Bill turned to the business of helping to unload the drill. It was heavy and awkward to handle, but he felt an exhilarating force surge through him as he tugged and strained. Something that was not exertion left him hot and perspiring.

"Yep", he affirmed enthusiastically. "I got a mine here all right. Now I will prove the worth of my claims. Proof is all we need. Exploring surface work and trenching sure brought good showings. Even the sceptics had to admit that. We'll drill and show 'em. That's the way to convince Sam Greenback of the mining company."

"Greenback is a tough one, but this will do the trick," Bill kept thinking day after day, as he and Tom Brady pierced the rocks, angling deep down into the very heart of them.

Excitedly they waited to see their first core come up. The gray granite, to an underlying complex of igneous and sedimentary rocks dashed their hopes. But Bill's convictions remained unshaken.

"There must be mineral," he argued. "I had rich copper-nickel showings. Here along this ridge the instrument near went crazy. We'll try a little farther along. Must've angled the wrong way."

Laboriously they winched the drill along the fifty feet of boulder. They burrowed through the overburden till they struck the hanging wall, and passed into greenish-black quartz gabbro.

"This is more like it," Bill applauded. "I told you we had a mine".

Again they moved the machine, and yet again, following the dip of the

vein as best they could. They sought its windings near the surface; and drilled through a hundred-foot rock-wall to search out its hide-out. They missed it entirely; and hit it again, broader and thicker, pursuing its vagaries to the very end, where it narrowed to seeming obscurity at the lakeshore.

When they rested, Bill sat silent, thinking. Sometimes, the song of woodland lovers brought again the vision of the girl. He thought how, when the mine was sold, he could go to her with his wealth and love.

Then one day Matt Kern dropped from the skies. They heaped the freight compartment with core to be assayed at the Company lab, and Bill flew in to Steel with him.

While he waited for results, he sought out Sam Greenback. The gentle tapping of the typewriter ceased as he entered the office. He caught the glint of golden hair. Then the girl turned her dazzling smile on him.

"Hello, Bill. It's good to see you again," she greeted.

"It's good to be out of the sticks," Bill retorted.

His heart skipped a beat. She was real; and she was even more beautiful than he had visioned. But she was working for Sam Greenback. That's why she had not written.

He controlled his tinge of jealousy, and took the big chair Greenback offered.

"I have been drilling my claims at Prospector Lake," he announced. "The assay will tell the tale."

He tossed some choice samples of core on the table.

"Good copper-nickel showings," he boasted.

The mining magnate examined the samples closely.

"Every day or so some fellow thinks

he has a mine," he said sourly. "They bring their samples, and waste our time. But this looks good. If your assays come up to expectations I'll make you an offer."

"If it's as good as that sample indicates, it should bring a fortune," Bill chuckled.

They discussed relative values in a lot of prospector jargon. Then Bill rose to go. Already Lila had her jacket on to join him.

Bill laughed confidently. Sam Greenback was interested. The thought pleased him, and, as he walked down Main Street with Lila Woods, he was up in the clouds.

He began to take notice of the displays in the shop windows.

"Now just what would a man do with a fortune?" Lila asked.

Bill rekindled his cigarette with a few vigorous puffs. He stopped speculatively before an Airways office.

"Travel," he said. "Or even buy his own plane. — And re-invest a little in the rocks."

"That sounds interesting," Lila commented. "Would you carry passengers?"

"One. I know a girl to take around the world with me. Would you come?" Bill searched her face as he spoke.

Lila's laughter rippled softly like a trilling robin.

"I've always wanted to see all the far places," she said. "But first — —"

"A lunch," Bill suggested.

He was still indulging in visions of opulence several hours later when he mounted the stairs to his hotel room, and caught sight of the special-delivery letter.

"The assay," he thought triumphantly, tearing open the envelope. Then he stared in shocked disbelief. His mine had fallen down.

There was mineral; but the averaged values were far below the require-

ments for economical exploitation. He was certain Sam Greenback would not give it a thought.

In bitter disappointment Bill made a few hasty calculations on the envelope.

"Less than a hundred bucks, when Tom Brady is paid off, and Matt Kern for his plane service," Bill lamented. "I have shot my chances with Lila. I haven't half enough for next winter's grubstake on the trapline."

Bill returned to Prospector Lake without seeing Lila or Sam Greenback again. Over their fried trout at noon, he broke the news to Tom.

"Tom, you've spoilt my mine. You, and your drilling outfit," he said attempting to hide his disappointment under a crust of light banter.

"The assay is pretty grim," he continued, handing it across to Tom.

"There is mineral," Tom consoled. "Somewhere the vein must continue. With this, even a small area of high grade would do it. Perhaps if we go deeper, or farther along the ridge on your old claims."

But Bill was beyond consolation. In his despair he craved solitude and time to think. Without another word he strode to his canoe.

Out on the Lake, he sought out all those fond, familiar things that should soothe a man's troubled soul: the vast expanse of lake; the rugged shoreline; the lobster, forever guarding Rocky Island; and the island itself. It rose massively, a green-black rock, exposed to sun and weather, to fall precipitately, and heap up in ridges of jointed and brecciated chaos, running the full length of it. Weathered and eroded, every fissure and fault was filled with leafmould of a thousand autumns. There the green of trees, and shrubs, and saxifrage had taken root, and proclaimed the will to live.

Bill's disheartened spirit did not respond to their courageous struggle for existence. He was too entirely enslaved by the gloom of bad luck to find solace in anything.

He had staked all his money on the rocks. He was almost penniless. His dream of a mine was dispelled by the hard facts of reality, and with it his hopes of asking Lila to be his wife. Nothing remained for him, except his wretched little cabin, two days' journey down the Turbulent.

Now no sweet vision beckoned to him. He thought of Lila tapping the keys of the typewriter in Sam Greenback's office. A vicious green monster took possession of him. His flaming jealousy conjured up weddings and honeymoons in which Lila was the bride, and he himself had no part. No one could expect a beautiful girl like Lila to accept the privations and isolation of a trapper's wife when Sam Greenback was on hand with his riches.

Morosely Bill pulled up to the island, and went ashore. He stretched himself in hopeless abandon on the bleak rock-ledge, and puffed a melancholy smoke-screen from his cigarette. It was a bitter blow to have been betrayed by his beloved rocks.

But even then his hand stole caressingly over their surface. His eyes found the top of the lobster, and wandered down to the rock-wall of the height on which it stood, till they dilated in sharp focus on a weather-eroded cleft just above him.

He sat bolt upright. The fresh rock-cut exposed a vein that electrified Bill Hilton, and sent him racing to his canoe for his tools, with all the despair gone from him. Once again the fever possessed him.

Hammer in hand, he climbed the cleft, knocked off a piece of rock, and



examined it. Then he sped back to camp.

"Tom," he shouted. "I think I've found the continuation of that vein."

Feverishly, Bill began to collect tools.

"Come," he said. "We have work to do."

They were loading their equipment into the canoe when they heard the staccato throb of a plane.

"I didn't expect Matt back today," Bill muttered uneasily, shielding his eyes with his hand to get a better view. Then, as the plane circled closer and banked for a landing, the staggering truth burst upon him.

"That ain't Matt Kern," he exclaimed. "It's Sam Greenback's outfit, and they're landing at Rocky Island."

"Are we taking some grub?" Tom asked.

"Tom, we ain't going," Bill said. "That sample I just showed you; I got it on the island."

Shakily Bill fumbled for a cigarette and lit it, while his eyes stared at Greenback's men in the distance.

"They're pitching tent, and staying a while, — canoe and all," Tom observed.

Bill's brows beetled in a meditative scowl.

"They're after my old claims," he conjectured. "They will be open for re-staking tonight at midnight, and Rocky Island is part of 'em."

"But you said they are worthless?" Tom reminded.

"One never knows. Greenback thinks there's a mine. He's staking all 'round me," Bill calculated.

He puffed viciously at his pipe.

"Or could it be they already know about the island?" he quaked.

Helplessly, the two men waited. The plane thundered off in the direction of Steel, and hunger at length

drove them back to camp, leaving their half-loaded canoe. In silence, they ate their pork and beans; in silence, lounged about their campfire. They felt grim in the face of their bad luck.

Then, in the dead of night, they stole back to Rocky Island, circling wide. They paddled silently as an Indian war party, and beached their canoe on the far shore.

Bill crept through the darkness, slowly feeling his way, till he could see the tent, pitched right before the rock-cleft.

His heart sank.

"They must have seen it," he thought desperately, his worried eyes on the gang sprawled about the campfire.

Still as one of the shadowed boulders, Bill listened.

"We better get going," someone said. "It's nearing midnight, and we start staking on the stroke of twelve."

For a breathing space, Bill stood rooted to the spot. Then he crept back to Tom. His stakes were ready; he would try to beat them at their own game.

The two men worked frantically in the darkness. They could hear the clamour of the gang as they appeared to be spreading out on the island. Their high spirits rang in shouts and laughter that echoed through the night. Hearing the merriment, Bill felt that he had little hope of winning. With two against four, it seemed they were beaten before they had begun.

An eerie silence fell. Bill and Tom could no longer hear Greenback's men, or know their whereabouts in the pitch blackness. At any moment, as they pursued their hopeless task, their rights might be disputed by another stake, or a living rival moving in the night.

"They'll dispute our claims, even if we do get it staked," Tom whispered gloomily.

"Quiet! They'll hear us," Bill cautioned.

Suddenly the drone of an outboard arrested their efforts. They made their way up over the ridge. Peering into the darkness, they could see a darker speck moving across the channel to the mainland.

The two men watched silently until the canoe was swallowed by the distance and the night.

Bill chuckled.

"They didn't see the vein," he exulted. "They don't know about Rocky Island; and for them, tomorrow will be too late."

All night Bill and Tom toiled and sweated. They staked it from one end to the other. The first light of dawn found them chiselling holes with their hand steel. They loaded them with TNT, and lit the fuse.

The faint putt-putt of Sam Greenback's gang came from the channel. Then the blasts drowned out the sound and echoed through the stillness of their waiting.

Feverishly, they picked up the pieces of rock that showered about the pit. Mutely, they passed them from one to the other. It was as if they had been struck dumb.

Then Bill began to fill his canvas poke with samples.

"It's a mine", he enthused. "With their tent ten feet away, it's still our claim. Won't them guys look sick when they realize they were sitting on the biggest mine in the North, and didn't know it?"

When Matt Kern landed at Bill Hilton's camp that same morning, he carried a passenger. She climbed nimbly from the plane, a trim girl in blue slacks.

"Hi, Bill," she called gaily.

Then, as they stood apart, she said "I know all about your mine failing, Bill. It doesn't make any difference. That's why I came. I wanted you to know."

Bill's heart sang. She loved him. The wonder of it!

"Sam Greenback is hiring prospectors to send to the Yukon," Lila was saying. "It's good money; and I'll wait for you."

Bill pointed to Rocky Island.

"Lila, darling, I've got it," he said. "This time it is sure. On that island will be the Hilton Mine to replace the lobster; and a lusty town will spring here in the wilderness. We'll build a house on this point when we return from the little jaunt, — our honeymoon."

## Poets and Writers Honored

Late in January, the Author's Society of Iceland honored two poets and writers with an honor scroll announcing that they had been made honorary members of the society. These poets are Guttormur J. Guttormsson, of Riverton, most distinguished among Icelandic poets on this continent, at

Icelandic poets on this continent, and Davíð Stefánsson, the most popular poet in Iceland. This honor was conferred on Davíð Stefánsson January 21st, on his 60th birthday.

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## *Wins Playwriting Contest*



Miss Lauga Geir

Miss Lauga Geir of Edinburg, N. Dakota was awarded the prize of \$50.00 in the play-writing contest sponsored by the Jon Sigurdson Chapter I.O.D.E. last year (the Jon Sigurdson chapter is one of the 950 chapters of the Nationally well-known Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, and works at the projects of that organization in the patriotic, educational and welfare field. In addition, the chapter, which is composed of women of Icelandic descent, has made worthy contributions in the field of Icelandic culture in its community and in the wider sphere.)

Participation in the play-writing competition was open to anyone except members of the Jon Sigurdson chapter, the play to be in three acts, in English, and based on the life of the Icelandic pioneers in America. Four entries were received by the

committee in charge of the contest, which was convened by Mrs. E. A. Isfeld.

Judges were Prof. G. L. Brodersen and Prof. Skuli Johnson both of the University of Manitoba, and Mrs. John Craig, well known in Winnipeg drama circles. Chairman of the committee, Prof. Brodersen commended Miss Geir's entry, which is entitled, "In the Wake of the Storm", and said it was well constructed and interesting.

Lauga Geir, who at one time taught at the Jon Bjarnason Academy in Winnipeg, is a 1923 graduate of the University of North Dakota, and received her Master of Arts degree in 1938 from the same institution. Major subjects for her M.A. were literature and drama. Since then she has taught in various high schools in N. Dakota, and at most of these she has been in charge of the dramatic activity of the students.

Miss Geir has also made a considerable contribution to the cultural efforts of her own community. She has prepared and composed short skits and pageants for special occasions in the Icelandic community of Mountain-Gardar and in 1941 she wrote and produced a pageant, "Manifestations of Icelandic Heritage in Pembina County", for a county meeting of the Pioneer Daughters.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Icelandic settlement in North Dakota in the summer of 1953, Miss Geir again produced this pageant which proved most effective and enhanced the cultural atmosphere of the celebration.

Lauga has written articles for mag-

azines, notably the "Ardis" and the Icelandic Canadian.

Her parents, Johann Geir and his wife, Anna Jónsdóttir, (from Kolstöðum in Dalasýsla) came from Iceland to New Iceland in 1876, in the first large group of settlers. They settled just south of Hnausa, but migrated to N. Dakota in 1880. Johann died shortly before Lauga was born, and as there were four other children she was brought up from infancy by neighbors of her mother. They were Davíð Jónsson and Thordís Guðmundsdóttir from Húnavatnssýsla, Iceland, who also had come to New Iceland in 1876, but moved to N. Dak., in 1882. They were her loving and loved foster-parents and their children's children are as close to her heart as if they were her blood relations.

During the last few years Lauga has given up teaching mainly because of somewhat impaired health, and she

now lives on her foster-father's old homestead about thirteen miles north of Edinburg, in the middle of the Gardar-Mountain community. She is not the one to pamper herself because of ill health, but continues to mete out her enthusiasm and talents for the cultural good of her environment. She started writing "In the Wake of the Storm", while in hospital in Winnipeg last fall, following a major operation.

The Jon Sigurdson chapter, which has first production rights to the play, is planning to produce it as early as possible.

We congratulate Lauga Geir on her winning effort and hope she may fully regain her health and energy for further participation in the cultural work of her district and the Icelandic community as a whole.

**Holmfridur Danielson**

## ANNUAL CONCERT OF THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN



**Judge Ásmundur Benson**

The Icelandic Canadian Club held its annual concert at the First Lutheran Church on February 22, 1955. Judge W. J. Lindal, the President of the Club presided. The chief speaker was **Judge Ásmundur Benson** of Rugby, North Dakota. His topic was the foreign policy of the United States.

### ÆVISAGA

#### HELGA EINARSSONAR

In a letter received from the author, he states that his book is selling beyond all expectations all over this continent. He requests us to publish the following very misleading misprints: On page 80, instead of 600 lbs. of fish should be 6000 lbs. or 3 tons. On page 148, instead of 30,000 lbs. should be 360,000, 12 railroad carloads, each 30,000 lbs. On page 183 instead of 250,00, should be 25,000.



## HONORED BY ICELAND



Miss Margrét Pétursson

Miss Margrét Pétursson, Judge Walter J. Lindal and Dr. Lárus Sigurdson, have been invested with the Knight Cross of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon, for their participation in Icelandic cultural activities. Presentation was made by L. G. Johannsson, Icelandic Consul for the prairie provinces, at his home on February 20th. In each case the decoration was accompanied by an honor scroll.

Our readers will recall that Miss Pétursson, Judge Lindal and Dr. Sigurdson, served with distinction on the committee which was in charge of raising the endowment fund for the Chair in Icelandic language and literature at the University of Manitoba.



Dr. Lárus Sigurdson



Judge Walter J. Lindal

## BOOK REVIEW

### "NJÁLS SAGA",

#### Icelandic Masterpiece Ready

The great Icelandic classic "Njál's Saga," published by the American Scandinavian Foundation in cooperation with New York University Press, will be mailed free to all Sustaining, Sponsoring and Life Associates of ASF at the end of this month. The old Icelandic saga has been translated by Prof. Carl F. Bayerschmidt, Chairman of the Department of Germanic Languages at Columbia University, and Prof. Lee M. Hollander, Professor of Germanic Languages at the University of Texas. Handsomely printed and bound, the book will retail at \$6.50 though Associates of the Foundation are entitled to a 25% discount.

The first ASF publication for 1955, *Njál's Saga* is one of the great masterpieces of world literature. While the anonymous thirteenth century author based his tale on actual past adventures experienced by his countrymen, he improvised freely in the creation of marvellous scenes and events that roll to a dramatic climax in the death by fire of Njál, his loyal wife and his sons. In contemporary literature the saga has influenced such poet-dramatists as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (*Burnt Njál*).

A previous translation of the classic, excellent for its time, is now almost a century old. Victorian mannerisms mar the writing, and modern study has revealed the scholarship to be outdated.

Benefiting from our new knowledge of the distinction that must be made between the prose of the saga and its archaic verse and aided by the easy idiom of our day, Professors Bayerschmidt and Hollander have produced

a translation that is both readable and authentic. They have based their work on the much-admired edition in Icelandic by Finnur Jónsson, and the exactness of their rendering makes the book extremely useful for study of the language.

Splendor of character portrayal, richness of material and the dramatic feeling of controlled understatement characterize these narratives. The saga style has been compared to a snow-covered volcano—cold and impersonal on the surface but glowing with passion underneath. And the translators have succeeded in preserving both characteristics of the style.

*Njál's Saga*, which is approximately 400 pages long, contains maps, notes and a selected bibliography.

Reprinted from SCAN, the monthly bulletin of *The American Scandinavian Foundation* by permission of the publishers.

★

#### From Chapter 1 of *Njál's Saga*

It happened one day that Höskuld invited his friends to a feast, and his brother, Hrút, was there and occupied the seat beside him. Höskuld had a daughter named Hallgerd who was playing on the floor with some other girls. She was beautiful and tall; her hair shone like silk and was so long that it came down to her waist. Höskuld called to her: "Come here, my daughter!"

She came to him immediately and he chucked her under the chin and kissed her. After that she went away again. Then Höskuld remarked to Hrút: "What do you think of this girl? Don't you think she's beautiful?"

At first Hrút remained silent. When Höskuld repeated the question, Hrút

answered: "Beautiful this maiden certainly is, and many are likely to suffer for it; but I don't know whence thief's eyes have come into our kin!"

★

### From Chapter 159 (the closing chapter)

This is the story told of Flosi's end. When he had become an old man he sailed abroad to fetch timber to build himself a hall. That winter he stayed in Norway, but the following summer he was late in getting ready to sail. People said that his ship was not seaworthy, but Flosi said it was good enough for an old man who was soon to die. He went on board and sailed out into the sea and nothing was ever again seen of the ship.

★

"All the Icelandic sagas, and this one in particular, spoil one for the reading of contemporary tales." (a prominent novelist's comment).

### EFTIRLEIT

P. S. Pálsson, Reykjavík  
1954, 92 pages.

The number of Icelandic poets in this country to whom the

Ástkæra, ylhýra málið,  
og allri rödd fegra

is still the melodious and powerful medium they choose for expressing their inmost thoughts and feeling, is rapidly decreasing as the grim reaper takes his toll. It is, therefore, very appropriate that any gems of poetry which have not appeared in print should be put on the record to become a part of a living memory of a passing period in the history of the Icelanders of the West.

In this category can be placed a booklet of verse by Páll S. Pálsson which he fittingly calls "Eftirleit",

(Searching). The first and the leading poem in the group is the answer to his search and in that poem the author's depth of feeling is brought to light in a way that grips the reader. It is "Til konunnar minnar", "To my Wife", composed in 1950, on the occasion of their fortieth wedding anniversary. In a few touches, which only a poet could pen, Páll reveals the aim in life he had set himself and his disappointment when it was not given to him to find the correct path. But in the hour of darkest struggle he finds solace in the love of his wife:

En ávallt, er hrellingin huga minn  
í helfjötra lagði, var svipur þinn  
í þokunni vörður og viti.  
Svo jafnvel í myrkrinu svartasta eg sá  
silfur- og gullbjarma á þokuna slá,  
sem gáfu henni guðborna liti.

In the twilight of life the poet feels the mutual love they have shared which sheds a glow of sunset upon what remains of life on earth:

Svo eigum við kvöldroðann eftir að  
sjá  
og aftan-skin friðandi og blítt.  
Eg veit, þegar kvöldar þú verður mér  
hjá,  
þá verður allt fagurt og hlýtt.  
Við norður-ljóss birtu þá búum við för  
und bláhimins stjarnanna fjöld.  
Og þögul við ýtum úr þreytunnar vör.  
—Já, það verður yndislegt kvöld.

Life has been as if at the crossroads to the men and women who migrated to Canada in the latter years of their youth. They have looked back even as they looked forward. The sentiment

\* The word "eftirleit" usually refers to the last search for sheep in the fall. Here, as the poet admits, he plays on the meaning of the word and extends it to include the search for what he has sought all his life.

of a seemingly divided love and loyalty is vividly portrayed in "Tvö minni", "Two Toasts", parts of which follow:

Ísland

Þú mikla drottning, móðir, ástmey,  
kona;

við metum þig og þísum allt þitt ráð,  
og meðan íslensk hjörtu ei hætta að  
vona

í hljóðri bæn þig felum drottins náð.

Canada

Svo þess vegna höfum vér lagt þér  
vort lið,

og löndin þín fagað og þrýtt,  
og svarið þér trúnað. Þú gafst okkur  
grið,

við gáfum þér útsýni nýtt.

The poet but echoes the sentiment of all Icelanders of the West in the last two lines of his poem to Maria Markan:

Þú verður æ íslenskum Vesturheimi  
vonarstjarna í myrkum geimi.

There is an addenda which the author calls "Rökkurljóð", a group of poems which came into existence during the church controversy. The purpose, no doubt, in putting them on the record, was not to establish merits or demerits on either side but rather to show that the wounds which such controversies create are slow to heal and may re-open if people forget the inevitable toll if such controversies should be staged again. **W. J. L.**

## Loptson Appointed Grain Commissioner



**Stanley Loptson**

Stanley Loptson, who operates a 1700-acre farm in the Bredenbury, Saskatchewan district, was sworn in as

a commissioner of the board of grain commissioners by Mr. Justice Paul Du-Val in the Law Courts Building, Winnipeg, on Friday, March 11, 1955. He succeeds John Vallance who retired Thursday. D. G. McKenzie, chief commissioner of the Board, witnessed the official appointment.

In addition to his farming operations and membership in the Saskatchewan Farmer's Union Mr. Loptson was a director of the United Grain Growers of Canada, a post he vacated Thursday.

Mr. Loptson is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Ásmundur (Mundi) Loptson of Yorkton, Sask., who were among the earliest pioneers in Eastern Saskatchewan. Mr. Loptson Sr. has recently retired from the leadership of the provincial Liberal Party in Saskatchewan. (See Icel. Can. Vol. 12, No. 2. —Olafs Almanac, 1920, page 50. —"Bóndinn á Heiðinni" by Guðlaugur Jónsson, page 149.)



## Two Icelandic Settlements

The following are two excerpts from an historical account "**Icelandic Emigration and Frontier Settlement in America**", by JOHN B. MEYER, of Madison, Wisconsin.

### WASHINGTON ISLAND, WISCONSIN

Washington Island is about six miles square off the tip of Door County, Wisconsin. Formerly it was densely inhabited by Indians, but about 1850 white settlers moved in and began a fishing industry. They confined their settlement to the coast. Then in 1868 seven Danes came to the island, homesteaded their plots and started clearing the dense forest growth so that they could become farmers. When the Icelanders arrived on the island in 1870, there were only 189 acres of cleared land<sup>1</sup>. On this land was produced the previous season 30 bushels of wheat, 1151 bushels of potatoes, 53 tons of hay and 1,628 pounds of butter<sup>2</sup>.

Mr. William Wickmann was one of the Danes who had come to Washington Island, and who was the person instrumental in bringing the Icelanders to this place. "At first some of the Icelanders were disappointed, and had they been able would have returned. But before they had obtained the means to do so, they had adapted themselves to the changed conditions and grown contented."<sup>3</sup> The new arrivals from Iceland helped expand the settlement, but many of these pioneers did not remain, wishing, instead, to

homestead the prairie lands to the west. Nevertheless the Icelandic population in 1917 was near 200, or about one-fifth of the entire population on the island.<sup>4</sup> Although no figures are available of the present number, it seems likely that the normal increase of one percent per year would have made the total now about 260 to 280, if most of this expected increase has remained on the island. However, ration book issuances during World War II indicated a total population on the island of only about 600, whereas the pre-war figure stood at over 1,100 inhabitants,<sup>5</sup> so the figure of 260 would appear to be too high.

The first economy of the Icelanders depended on fishing, as was the case for other nationalities on the island, but as fish began to get scarce, many fell to tilling the soil, cutting timber, and building vessels, of which sixteen were owned in 1898.<sup>6</sup> Several of these vessels were engaged in carrying away the lumber and shingles which were cut on Washington Island.<sup>7</sup> In the 1920's the fishermen (all nationalities—there are very few statistics, and very little written on the Icelanders alone) caught as many as four thousand pounds of fish in one day, thus making from \$15,000 to \$16,000 a season. Today they catch from one hundred to six and seven hundred pounds a day,

1. H. R. Holand, **History of Door County**, Vol. 1, Chicago 1917, p. 287.

2. *ibid.*

3. Harry K. White, **Wis. Historical Collection**, Vol. XIV, "The Icelanders on Washington Island," Madison, 1898, p. 338.

4. H. R. Holand, *op. cit.* p. 293.

5. **The Icelandic Canadian**, Vol. 4, No. 3, Winnipeg, Mar. 1946, p. 15.

6. Harry K. White, *op. cit.* p. 338.

7. *ibid.*

which just gives them a living.<sup>8</sup> About one million pounds of whitefish, trout, herring, suckers, and chubs are shipped annually to Chicago, New York, and other markets."<sup>9</sup> The discrepancies in these figures are not accounted for, since one set says there are five times as many exported annually as the other set of figures says are caught. In any event, it is certain that fishing is not as important as it was in the past, giving way to the two other main economic activities on the island, farming and summer resort trade. Very little information was available on these two means of livelihood, but it is known that potatoes are grown on the island, 40,000 bushels being exported annually about 1917,<sup>10</sup> and cattle and sheep raising is practiced on many of the farms.<sup>11</sup> As in Iceland, growing hay is an important part of the farm system.

Since nothing has been written, or nothing could be found by the author, on the social life of the Icelanders on Washington Island, it is difficult to determine, without first hand knowledge, the extent to which they have been held together as a group and the degree to which they have continued the customs and practices known in Iceland. Mr. Harry K. White, in an article on the Icelanders said, "At present the Icelanders are quite thoroughly scattered over the island, and although they form less than a sixth of the entire population and readily adopt ideas and methods that are an improvement on their own, their in-

fluence is easily discernible."<sup>12</sup> He also said that while there are several churches on the island, they are not well supported by the Icelanders.<sup>13</sup>

**Editor's Note**—Washington Island is located at the mouth of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Not far distant is Sister Bay, where several Icelandic people have made their homes. Seven miles long and  $5\frac{1}{4}$  miles wide, the island has been compared to a 14,000 acre park. It has timbered hills and valleys, and beautiful wild shore scenes, with high, rocky bluffs and sandy beaches.

The six hundred inhabitants of the island are largely of Scandinavian descent.



### PEMBINA COUNTY, North Dakota

The leader in the Icelandic settlement in Pembina County was Rev. Pall Thorlaksson. In 1878, he set out from New Iceland, Manitoba, with four men in search of a place where the Icelanders might prosper, for he foresaw the difficulties of conducting agricultural practices in the swampy and wooded Gimli colony.<sup>14</sup> This party decided to settle in the north-easternmost county of North Dakota—Pembina County. The reasons for their choice were as follows:<sup>15</sup>

1. The settlement would be fairly close to New Iceland.
2. There were many trees which could be used as building material whereas Minnesota, which was also being considered, possessed none.
3. The Pembina Mountains (though only hills) afforded the pioneers some semblance of their mountainous homeland.

8. Travel, Vernie Wolfsberg, "Iceland's first settlement in America," Vol. 82, No. 1, E. Straudsburg, Pa., Nov. 1943, p. 34.

9. The Icelandic Canadian, op. cit. p. 15.

10. History of Door County, op. cit. p. 276.

11. Vernie Wolfsberg, op. cit. see photo, p. 22.

12. Harry K. White, op. cit. p. 332.

13. *ibid.*

14. History of the Red River Valley, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1950, p. 50.

15. Thorstina Walters, Modern Sagas, Fargo, N. D., 1953, pp.59-60.

4. There was abundant land available for agricultural settlement.

There was no definite colony laid out as was done at New Iceland. The settlers took up the land mostly by homesteading, although they had two other choices, pre-emption and tree claim settlement. By taking up land either of the first two ways each settler had to live on his farm for three years to obtain permanent possession of his 160 acres. By tree claim, the settler had to plant six thousand trees on his property and have a satisfactory number of them living after three years.<sup>16</sup> The first home was built at the present town of Hallson, in 1878.<sup>17</sup> In 1879 about fifty families moved to the new settlement from New Iceland, most of which were without money or belongings. It was through the untiring efforts of Rev. Thorlaksson, by soliciting money and agricultural supplies from his Norwegian friends, that the settlement survived. "Indeed without the aid given by this man, who assumed heavy personal liabilities in obtaining provisions for the settlers, it is difficult to see how they could have secured the necessities of life."<sup>18</sup> In describing the value of Rev. Thorlaksson's assistance, Thorstina Walters said, "One fact not to be overlooked was that there was neither work nor credit to be had in the immediate area of the settlement. The locality where the Icelandic pioneers settled in the Dakota territory was in an extreme frontier state, therefore, contact with firmly established, progressive Norwegian settlements was invaluable. Not only did the pioneers receive

material aid from them but they also learned many important lessons in adjustment to their environment."<sup>19</sup>

Within the next two years large numbers of the New Iceland settlers arrived, and Icelandic people from Nova Scotia, Shawano County, Wisconsin and many from Washington Island, Wisconsin<sup>20</sup> were added to the settlement, now comprising the towns of Hallson, Mountain, Akra, Svold, Hensel, and Gardar.<sup>21</sup>

The years from 1878 to 1881 were the most trying ones. In spite of their failure to raise grain and vegetables, it was important for the pioneers to live on the land they had settled in order to prepare the soil for production and to gather hay for their livestock.<sup>22</sup> This was the beginning of their agricultural endeavor.

\*It was in 1880 that the newcomers took the first steps to prepare for a future based on agriculture. Cultivation of the soil did not begin until that year, and the initial efforts were very primitive; the homesteaders were hampered by the lack of horses, oxen, and farm implements. Many of the immigrants mortgaged their farms and went in debt to buy this needed equipment. The farm income was supplemented by selling cordwood, and obtaining work on well established farms.<sup>23</sup>

(Continued next issue)

16. *ibid.* pp. 66-67.

17. *North Dakota, American Guide Series*, New York, 1950, pp. 227-228

18. *History of the Red River Valley*, *op. cit.* pp. 254-255.

19. T. Walters, *op. cit.* pp. 65-66.

20. *ibid.* pp. 62-63.

21. *North Dakota*, *op. cit.* p. 227.

22. T. Walters, *op. cit.* p. 64.

\* Editor's Note—The first attempt at agriculture was 1879. In 1878, on arrival, 2 acres were broken, and these were seeded and cropped, 1879. (Rev. F. J. Bergmann, *Almanak O. Th.*, 1902, pp. 23-25) —W. K.

23. *Social Forces*, "The Icelandic Community in North Dakota," Thorstina Jackson, Vol. 4, No. 2, Univ. of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, N. Car., pp. 356-57.